DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 233 994 SP 022 877

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TITLE What Research Says: About the Correlation between Athletic Participation and Academic Achievement.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Athletes; *Athletics; College Students; Higher Education; High School Students; Junior High School Students; Secondary Education; Sex Differences; *Student Participation

ABSTRACT

Research has differing things to say about the effects of athletic participation on the academic achievement of athletes. Interest in this relationship has generated a number of studies at the high school and college levels, although little has been done at the junior high school level. A review, done in 1934, of 41 studies found that non-athletes performed slightly better in schoolwork than did athletes, and that athletes tended to get better grades once the sports season was over. More recent studies show a positive relationship between academic achievement and athletic participation. Similar results were found in a 10-year study which showed that athletes' academic achievement was not significantly lower than that of non-athletes. A study extending previous research found that participation in athletics had a positive effect on participants' aspirations and income. One study found athletics interfering with the academic objectives of high school; however, other studies found athletic participation had a positive rather than negative effect and that a greater proportion of athletes rather than non-athletes attend college. Results have shown that there appears to be a correlation between participation in sports and academic achievement, but further studies need to be undertaken. (JMK)

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WHAT RESEARCH SAYS: ABOUT THE CORRELATION BETWEEN ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Robert J. Ballantine

The present trend in education is to reduce athletic programs. The public schools are feeling the crunch of the 1980's economy thereby causing cutbacks in education. Local school boards have begun to examine the possibility of reducing or eliminating athletic programs. Do athletic programs have a place in the curriculum? Do athletic programs influence the academic achievement of participants?

The question then arises as to the effect of athletic programs on the academic achievement of the participants. What does the current literature and research say about the effects of athletic participation on the academic achievement of athletes?

Interest in the relationship between involvement in sports and academic performance has generated a number of studies at the high school and college levels. Davis and Cooper (1934) reviewed 41 studies. Based on their review they concluded that non-athletes performed slightly better in schoolwork than athletes. Moreover they noted that athletes tend to get better grades once the sports season is over.

However, more recent studies by Eidsmore (1961, 1963) showed a positive relationship between academic achievement and athletic participation. He found that male and female basketball players as well as male football players were "brighter" students than their classmates based on a comparitive analysis of grade point averages. Loy, McPherson, and Kenyon (1978) stated that their research findings also showed that athletes had a higher level of academic performance than the non-athletes. Why is there a correlation? Spady (1970) reasoned there is a link between mental and physical ability or

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that the better students are involved in a variety of extracurricular activities of which sports is one of these activities. Rehberg (1969) stated that there are five intervening factors between athletic participation and academic achievement: (1) association with highly achievement peers; (2) transfer of achievement value from sport to classroom environment; (3) an increased self-esteem which creates a higher level of aspiration in other domains; (4) pressure applied internally and externally to present a consistent image in all areas as a successful individual; and (5) more scholastic and career guidance from a significant adult.

What does the educational system receive from athletic programs? Grant (1979) reasoned that,

> education cannot be separated from society, their relationships is fundamental and pervasive. Some purists believe that any external influence on educational institutions is to be deplored as contaminating the educational purpose. To others including the vast majority of administrators, it is a question of degree - what benefit does the institution receive and what price is demanded in return (p. 409)?

This viewpoint relates to the problem of athletic attainment in higher education and what price the institution and the athlete have to pay.

Higher educational institutions believe that the cost of athletics is a great burden on education. Contrary to this belief, Robert H. Atwell (1979) stated athletics are:

> a small part of the higher education industry; it accounts for not more than about one percent of the $55 billion currently spent by institutions of higher education (p. 367).

Roper and Snow (1976) studies suggested that big-time athletics: (1) attracted good students, and (2) attracted financial contributions both private and public which enabled programs of academic excellence and athletics. This was reputed by Roper and Snow. They argued that higher education has a myriad of problems with regards to athletics. The benefit/

burden undertaken by the institution with the pressure of society wanting entertainment while the cost of such a program may have influenced the outcome of the objective.

The problem of objectives also is related to the college athlete and his individual attainment. Larson (1973) pointed out that academic achievement of athletes at the University of Tennessee, was slightly less than non-athletes based on grade point average and ACT scores over a one year period. Larson stated that athletes appeared to be more persistent in working for graduation than non-athletes, but that a four year time span is not the most reliable criterion. College athletes may have more problems fulfilling graduation requirements because of the amount of time sports participation requires.

Purdy (1981) suggested that similar results over a ten year study showed athletes' academic achievement was not significantly lower than non-athletes. He also found that female athletes' grade point averages were significantly higher than non-athlete students, and black athletes had significantly lower educational achievement levels. His data tended to bear out that athletes in individual sports who had high grades were more likely to graduate. He concludes that some athletes have lower GPA's because of the time demand and and the pressure to participate in "revenue" sports, of which causes financial and academic problems. He concluded that his findings showed slight positive effect on the grade point average of college athletes overall.

A study by Otto and Alwin (1977) extended previous research and found that participation in athletics also had a positive effect on occupational aspirations and income. Loy, McPherson, and Kenyon (1969) suggested that there are four ways in which sports participation can facilitate this upward social class movement: (1) the early development of sport skills may

facilitate recruitment and entrance directly into professional sport; (2) involvement in sport may lead to receiving an athletic scholarship which may directly or indirectly enhance educational attainment; (3) participation in sports may lead to "occupational sponsorship" by which a former athlete is given preferential treatment in hiring or promotion; and (4) involvement in may result in learning attitudes and behavior patterns (e.g. achievement orientation, leadership traits) considered important in the occupational world.

From the college dilemma to high school somewhat different problems emerge. Schafer and Armer (1968) stated there are at least five different ways in which athletics interferes with the academic objectives and academic climate of the school:

(1) An excessive amount of resources, personnel, and facilities of the high school is diverted from more fruitful activities.

(2) Although sports may get many parents and other adults apparently interested in school affairs, this interest is not in education itself but in a marginal activity - and therefore it may actually distract from any real educational involvement on their part.

(3) Pep rallies, trips, attending games, floats, displays, and all the other paraphernalia combine to draw students away from their studies.

(4) Many potentially good students become discouraged about trying for academic excellence because the big rewards of popularity and status go to the athletes and cheerleaders. Rather than being rewarded the serious student may actually be ridiculed as a "square" and a "grind."

(5) Sports demand so much time, energy, and concentration from the athletes and gives them so much prestige compared to their studies that their schoolwork must inevitably suffer.

Rehberg and Schafer (1968) documented studies that athletic participation does not appear to have an overall detrimental effect on academic performance. In fact, it might have a positive effect. Results found athletes had a higher grade point average than the non-athletes. Schafer and

Armer (1968) dealt with the questions of the amount of participation and the type of sport. They found a positive correlation between athletes participation and grade point average. However, participation in football and basketball had a more adverse effect on academic performance than participation in minor sports. The study showed that participants in the major sports have somewhat lower in grade point averages than participants in minor sports. Those in major sports exceed their non-athletic peers to a greater extent than do those in minor sports. Finally, they suggested that boys who would usually have the most trouble in school are precisely the ones who seem to benefit the most from taking part in sports.

Rehberg and Schafer (1968) found that athletes more than non-athletes had a greater proportion going to college. Spady (1970) discovered that students' roles in the high school peer group was a definite source for his success and aspirations, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

There is little up-to-date research on junior high athletics. A study by Buhrman (1972) included 158 boys who attended two junior high schools in a southern Oregon city. The data were collected at the end of the school year from records and specially administered athletic rating sheets. Three factors were evaluated: 1) difference between grade point average of athletes and non-athletes, 2) relationships of socio-economic status and previous grade point average, and 3) measures of athletic involvement and academic achievement.

There were 63 matches based on athletes, non-athletes, socio-economic status and previous grade point average. The gamma method of association developed by Goodman and Kriskal was used to analyze the data because it stressed the selective matched-pair relationship between athletes and

non-athletes, based on ordered classes. Results showed a significant relationship (.01) of athletes to non-athletes on grade point average. The findings showed the higher the socio-economic status of a student, the higher his grade point average at the end of elementary school, the greater the chances of his being an athlete and also the greater his chances of doing well academically in junior high school. Finally, the lower the socio-economic status of the athlete and the higher their previous grade point average, the greater their chances of achieving higher levels of achievement in junior high school as compared to non-athletic students. The results showed that the more and the longer junior high school athletes participated in varsity sports, the higher the quality of their athletic performance, the more they exceeded their non-athletic peers in grade point average.

In summary, there appears to be a correlation between participation in sports and academic achievement. This relationship seems to hold for those from a lower socio-economic background and those who attended a junior high school at which the athletic role is highly valued, while peer group membership had a significant effect on academic achievement and aspirations to attend college. There needs to be further study on this area. It may give athletic programs greater credibility in terms of making a contribution to the social and academic development of participants.

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